

uninsured. Although the Affordable Care Act and President Biden's expansion of the Affordable Care Act have helped many receive healthcare coverage, people of color remain less likely to have healthcare coverage.

It is our duty in Congress to ensure that our Hispanic and Latino communities have the resources and access to healthcare they need so we can close the gap between them and their White counterparts. This comes with educating these communities on how to sign up and receive healthcare. It also comes with comprehensive immigration reform to provide an easier pathway to citizenship so people can come out of the shadows.

Regardless of the repercussions of the pandemic, Hispanic and Latino Americans remain optimistic, filled with love and pride for their families, communities, and the United States of America. I want to take this opportunity to thank Hispanic and Latino Americans for their contributions that have made the United States the country it is today. I want to thank the hard-working Hispanic and Latino essential workers who have put their lives at risk to keep our country running during the pandemic. I want to thank the Hispanic and Latino communities who love our Nation and strive to change it for the better. Thank you for being an important part of the American story.

REMEMBERING AMBASSADOR GEORGE S. VEST, III

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I would like to bring to the attention of colleagues the recent passing of longtime U.S. diplomat George Southall Vest, III, a long-time resident of Bethesda, MD. He was 102 years old. His career with the State Department spanned the Cold War era, from 1947 to 1989. As chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, I want to draw particular attention to Ambassador Vest's representation of the United States at the initial multilateral discussions of 35 countries that led to an historic summit in Helsinki, Finland, from July 30 to August 1, 1975, where the Helsinki Final Act was signed.

An all-European summit was not a priority for the United States in the early 1970s. Indeed, it was a long-standing Soviet proposal, and Washington was wary of its use to confirm the division of Europe, give added legitimacy to communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and provide an opportunity for Moscow to divide the United States from its European allies. Washington agreed to engage but saw little value in the effort. As Ambassador Vest himself was quoted as saying, "This was the first time after World War II where all the Eastern European countries, all the Western European countries, together with Canada and the United States, sat down to talk about security and cooperation . . . I had very, very few instructions. I was left pretty much to feel my own way."

The early work of Ambassador Vest and his team and that of his immediate successors led to the Helsinki Final Act, which included 10 principles guiding relations between states that serve as a basis, to this day, of our response to events in Europe, including Russia's aggression against Ukraine and other neighbors. The Final Act provided a comprehensive definition of security that includes respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the basis for us to address today's brutal crack-down on dissent in Belarus and authoritarianism elsewhere. It also provided for a follow-up to the Final Act with regular reviews of implementation and development of new norms, a multilateral effort now represented by today's 57-country Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, with its important institutions and field missions.

Ambassador Vest, left pretty much to feel his own way, may not have intended to make such an impact on European security. Keep in mind that he represented the United States in these negotiations during the tumultuous time of U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, an oil crisis on the horizon, the growing Watergate scandal at home, and a rising Soviet threat across the globe. Nevertheless, his initial efforts contributed to an end of the Cold War division of Europe rather than a confirmation of it. That is quite a turnaround. I should add that the Congress later played a major role in shaping the U.S. contribution to this result when it created the Helsinki Commission in 1976. While things have changed since then, the Commission does now what it did in the late 1970s: ensure that human rights considerations are central to U.S. foreign policy and U.S. relations with other countries.

Given the challenges we face today, I hope it is useful to remind my colleagues of Ambassador Vest's legacy as a diplomat. Both before and after the negotiations, he served in positions in which he worked to strengthen ties with Europe, including through the NATO alliance and dialogue with a growing European Union. He was also a mentor to new generations of American diplomats. All of this followed his combat service as a forward artillery observer in Europe during World War II.

George Vest joined the Foreign Service in 1947, after using the G.I. Bill to earn his master's degree in history from the University of Virginia, where he had received his B.A. in 1941. He served as Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs under President Carter and as U.S. Ambassador to the European Union from 1981 to 1985. His last assignment at the State Department was as Director General of the Foreign Service. He retired in 1989 as a "career ambassador," a rank requiring a Presidential nomination and Senate confirmation.

George Vest's father was an Episcopal priest and Vest graduated from

the Episcopal High School in Alexandria, VA, before attending U-Va. He was as dedicated to his church as he was to our Nation. He served on the vestry at St. Albans Episcopal Church and volunteered in its Opportunity (thrift) Shop, both located on the Close of Washington National Cathedral. He also tutored students in DC public schools. Two sons, George S. Vest, IV of Fairfax, VA, and Henry Vest of Broomfield, CO, and two granddaughters survive him. I send my condolences to his family and thank them for his life of service. Let us be inspired by Ambassador George Vest and plant our own seeds for a better world tomorrow.

RECOGNIZING THE DEPARTMENT OF MAINE, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY

Mr. KING. Madam President, I rise today in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the Department of Maine, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Maine VFW. Maine VFW was founded in 1921 as a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving U.S. veterans of overseas conflicts, advocating for all veterans, their families, and their communities, and recognizing the sacrifices America's servicemen and women have made for this great country. Maine VFW, alongside its sister chapters across the United States, represents the oldest war veterans' organization in America. Every year for the last century, it has made a positive and tangible impact for Maine veterans. Maine VFW deserves not only our admiration, but also our gratitude.

Since its founding, Maine VFW has secured an array of remarkable victories for its membership and the many communities it serves. Through the Veterans Affairs office at Togus, Maine VFW helps recoup more than \$5 million in earned benefits every year. Maine VFW also advocates for veterans and their families at the State and National level and has helped shape national security and veterans' policy for generations of Americans. In 2020, for example, Maine VFW helped expand the VA's list of conditions for which there is a presumptive service connection for veterans exposed to Agent Orange and has made important strides to support veterans exposed to toxic chemicals in the first Gulf War and the Global War on Terror. Additionally, Maine VFW has worked tirelessly to improve mental healthcare for American veterans and successfully advocated for the John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act, landmark legislation to increase the VA's mental health workforce and strengthen rural veterans' access to care, which was signed into law last year. Pursuant to its commitment to patriotic service, stewardship, and education, Maine VFW also spearheads a variety of community advocacy initiatives, food and blood drives, and Homeless Veterans Stand Downs to respond